

East Hartford  
14 Ord 7/7

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Psa 66, 2 Kings 5:1-19, Lk 10:1-20

## Expectations??!!

Prayer -

We all know something about expectations - after all, we all have them - expectations of ourselves, and others; our kids, our employers and/or employees, our colleagues, friends, neighbors. We expect our pets to behave in the house, we expect teachers to teach, fire fighters to fight fires, students to learn. Others have expectations of us. We grew up with expectations - from parents, teachers, youth leaders. Sometimes our expectations are conscious and clear, sometimes it is not until we are disappointed that we become aware of the expectations we were holding. Expectations are part of the very air that we breathe.

Page # Naaman, *commander of the army of the King of Aram*, today's Damascus, also breathed the air of expectations. Because Naaman, with God's help, had led Aram's military forces to victory, probably exceeding the King's expectations, Naaman was *in high favor with his master*.

Military prowess, leadership skill, and personal strength notwithstanding, Naaman had a problem; leprosy. Leprosy would have been have been painful and disfiguring. Leprosy, unhealed, would inexorably and inevitably lead to significant social ostracism, eventually to a near total isolation. His future was bleak.

Except that a nobody, (a lowlife even among the 99%)  
an Israelite slave girl, very likely a "spoil" from some military campaign,  
who served Naaman's wife had a suggestion:  
"If only Naaman would visit the prophet Elisha in Samaria, Elisha would cure Naaman's leprosy."

Naaman's wife delivered the message, then Naaman kicked the idea upstairs. The king of Aram (a member of the 1%) so loved Naaman and so bought the argument that he not only wrote a letter to the king of Israel, (another member of the 1%) he also provided incredibly valuable gifts to smooth the way. I saw one estimate of 1.5 million in today's dollars. The text says, *"ten talents of silver, 6000 sheckels of gold, and ten sets of garments."*

Except - Naaman was directed to see the prophet Elisha, not the king of Israel - so when Naaman arrived at the King's office, Israel's king was understandably distressed, figuring that he had been set up for failure. He should have known better and just sent Naaman to see Elisha, instead he had a meltdown, tore his robe and went around moaning and groaning "woe is me."

Gossip travels as gossip will, so when Elisha, the man of God, got wind of the king's distress he sent word inviting Naaman to meet with him, "so he might learn that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman and his entourage pushed on to Elisha's house, only to be greeted by a messenger- not what he expected.

The messenger delivered these instructions. "Go wash in the Jordan seven times. Your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." This was the promise that Naaman needed. "Healed and made clean." The promise of a normal life. Everything he dared hope for! All he had to do was follow the instructions: "Wash in the Jordan seven times." Not what he expected. We can sorta hear Naaman ( a member of the 2% if not the 1%) saying:

I expected the prophet to come out for me.

I expected him to call on the name of the Lord his God.

I expected him to do the magic - you know, wave his hand over the spot, cure the leprosy.

Pout. Pout. Pout

Instead, I got a messenger.

Instead I got instructions, delivered by a messenger, “Go wash in the Jordan river. . . . Go wash in the Jordan River seven times no less.”

Doesn't he know that the Jordan River is muddy?

Pout. Pout. Pout.

“We have wonderful clean rivers in Damascus, better rivers than any of Israel's.” Naaman stomped off to pout some more.

Once again it is the nobodies, the servants, who step up and speak with the voice of reason. “Look, if he had set a serious challenge in front of you, you would have done it! In a heartbeat! How easy is this - wash 7 times in the Jordan. That's it!! You'll be clean and you get your life back!”

So the man who had already traveled 2-300 miles went another 25 down into the river valley and washed himself 7 times in the River Jordan. His flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, he was clean.

The man who was too proud to wash in the Jordan, immediately backtracked that last 25 miles to Elisha's house to give thanks, and offer the gifts that he carried.

He confessed to Elisha, “I now know there is no god, but the God of Israel. Please take these gifts that I have brought.” Elisha refused. So Naaman asked for enough of Israel's soil, that he might be able to stand upon it to pray when he was home in Damascus.

*17-18 “If you won't take anything,” said Naaman, “let me ask you for something: Give me a load of dirt, as much as a team of donkeys can carry, because I'm never again going to worship any god other than God. But there's one thing for which I need God's pardon: When my master, leaning on my arm, enters the shrine of Rimmon and worships there, and I'm with him there, worshiping Rimmon, may you see to it that God*

*forgive me for this.”*

*19-21 Elisha said, “Everything will be all right. Go in peace.”*

Friends, on a hot Sunday morning in July, what difference does it make to us that a man was cured of leprosy some 2 ½ or 3 thousand years ago? Do we even care?

We care because of what this story teaches us about God and God’s working in the world.

Remember who Naaman was. He was not of Israel’s tribe, he was an enemy. A great man, and, a man in desperate need. So desperate that he sought the prophet of God - Elisha.

God did this through the nobodies of the story - the slave girl, the wife, Elisha, who while he was the prophet, was certainly not a mover and a shaker amongst the powerful of Israel.

Naaman was cured of both his leprosy and his arrogance. His were the expectations of a powerful man. But in his gratitude he asks for dirt, that he might have a bit of Israel upon which to pray. He promises prayer, and confesses in advance his imperfect loyalty. Elisha assures him, *“It will be alright. Go in peace.”*

To me, sermons are most useful if they work on Mondays, not while we are in church, but while we are about our ordinary living. In this fourteenth week of ordinary time, let us look with expectation to see where God is working and where we who are of the 99% per cent can be about doing the work of love which is nothing more or less than the work of God.

Where is God working in love - God is at work in the friend who calls when you haven’t seen each other in awhile.

God is at work in the one who lets you go ahead in the check out

line.

God is at work in the one who says, "I'm sorry please forgive me."

God is at work in the one with a smile.

God is at work in the one who speaks out for the voiceless and works for the powerless.

God at work in the one who listens to the words of your mouth and hears the story of your heart.

Look with expectation. See. Do likewise.

Amen